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AUTHOR Krettenauer, Tobias; Grundmann, Matthias; Keller, Monika; Schmid, Christine

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INSTITUTION Max-Planck-Inst. for Human Development and Education, Berlin (Germany).

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ABSTRACT

This longitudinal study examined effects of family socialization on sociomoral reasoning in the context of the peer and parent-child relationships. Subjects were 121 urban Icelandic children. Social class was constructed as a multinominal measure defined by the nature of work, education, authority, and responsibility of the parents in the work system. Family socialization was assessed when subjects were age 7 to include sources of parental support and control techniques. Sociomoral development was assessed through reasoning about a friendship dilemma, including issues about close friendship and promise keeping assessed at ages 7, 9, 12, and 15; and reasoning about an authority dilemma, especially parent-child and sibling relationships, assessed at ages 12 and 15 years. Results of a loglinear multivariate analysis identified two family socialization factors: (1) a supportive factor indicating a discursive, culturally oriented, person-centered, and communicative family climate; and (2) a restrictiveness factor indicating power assertive control techniques. Regression analyses revealed that sociomoral reasoning in the context of peer relationships was significantly affected by both family socialization factors at age 7, 9, and 12 years. Supportive family socialization fostered sociomoral development in the peer domain for children and early adolescents. In middle adolescence, sociomoral reasoning in the context of peer relationships was largely independent of family socialization. For 12-year-olds, sociomoral sensitivity in the context of parent-child relationships was not affected by family socialization. However, in middle adolescence, supportive family socialization appeared to foster sociomoral development and restrictive socialization tended to hinder development. (Contains 11 references.) (Author/KB)

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The impact of family socialization on sociomoral development in childhood and adolescence

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Tobias Krettenauer,
Matthias Grundmann,
Monika Keller,
Christine Schmid

Max Planck Institute for Human Development and Education,
Berlin, Germany

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Introduction

Within the research tradition of sociomoral development established by Piaget and elaborated by Kohlberg, the impact of family socialization on the development of sociomoral reasoning has long been neglected (Powers, 1988). Instead, interactive processes of moral meaning making among peers were held to be the main factor contributing to sociomoral development in childhood and adolescence. However, a large body of empirical research provides evidence that family socialization is an important factor in sociomoral development (Walker & Taylor, 1991). Parenting styles characterized as „power assertive" (e.g., use of forceful commands; physical punishment, or control over resources; see Hoffman, 1980) tend to be negatively correlated with various measures of sociomoral maturity, thus impeding sociomoral development (Brody & Shaffer, 1982). By contrast, „inductive parenting", characterized by attempts to reason with the children and to broaden their understanding of the social world, fosters sociomoral development. Theoretically, these effects of family socialization can be interpreted as a result of two underlying processes:
(a) Different parenting styles either promote or impede the development of various interactive and communicative skills and consequently either facilitate or restrict productive interaction with peers and parents (Burleson, Delia, & Applegate, 1995).
(b) Daily family life continuously calls for the negotiation of conflicting claims of family members and for moral meaning making within the family that directly affects sociomoral development (see Smetana, 1989).

While the influence of family socialization is not in doubt empirically, little is known about how this influence changes in development. It is plausible to expect such changes in the transition from childhood to adolescence, where peer relations are increasingly important. Thus the influence of family socialization on sociomoral development may be reduced. The transition from childhood to adolescence is also associated with transformations of adolescents' view of parental authority (Youniss & Smollar, 1985). Within families, adolescents increasingly expect to be considered as autonomous individuals and to be treated as equals. This may enhance the importance of moral meaning making within the family, and consequently strengthen the influence of family socialization on sociomoral development. It follows that although the quantitative impact of family socialization may be constant over the course of sociomoral development, the underlying processes may change over time.

The aim of the study is to explore this idea. Domain specific effects of family socialization on sociomoral development are analyzed. Two domains are considered:
(a) sociomoral reasoning in the context of peer relations;
(b) sociomoral reasoning in the context of the parent-child relationship.
In line with the considerations outlined above it is expected that the impact of family socialization on sociomoral development in the context of peer relations decreases in the transition to adolescence. Conversely the influence of family socialization in the context of parent-child relationships should increase.

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Method

Sample

The present analyses are based on a longitudinal sample of 121 urban Icelandic children (see summary poster). Because of missing data, the following analysis do not include all subjects.

Variables

Social class was constructed as a multinominal measure with positions in the system of social unequality classified by the nature of work, education, authority, and responsibility of the parents in the work system (see summary poster).

Family socialization was assessed at the age of 7 years (see table 1). In addition to Hoffman's (1980) distinction between power assertive and inductive parenting styles we also consider the communicative skills of the child (e.g., parental education and cultural orientations; see Sigel, Stinson & Kim, 1993; Burleson, Delia & Applegate, 1995). These indicators represent important influences of the moral atmosphere in the family (Powers, 1988). These family socialization conditions can be interpreted as sources of parental support and control (Rollins & Thomas, 1979). To control for class specific variations of the socialization variables, social class is included in the analysis.

Sociomoral development was assessed by two tasks (see the poster of Keller & Schmid for a comprehensive description):
(1) Reasoning about a friendship dilemma, including various situation-specific issues and general reasoning about close friendship and promise keeping (assessed at ages 7, 9, 12, and 15 years).
(2) Reasoning about an authority dilemma, including various situation-specific issues and general reasoning about parent-child and sibling relationships (assessed at ages 12 and 15 years).
For the present analysis overall sum scores for the two contexts were used.

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Results

In a loglinear multivariate analysis which takes into account the overall variance of variables with different levels of measurement in a multidimensional space (see Gifi, 1991; Van DeGeer, 1993; Grundmann, 1995) two family socialization factors were extracted: A supportive factor indicating a discursive, culturally oriented, person-centered and communicative family climate; and a restrictiveness factor indicating power assertive control techniques. Because of its multinominal nature social class is located on both the support and restrictiveness dimensions.

Component loadings of socialization variables and social classes
(Nonlinear multivariate analysis; n=121)

	loadings	
variables	support	restrictiveness
social class 1. dimension	.66	-.34
social class 2. dimension	-.32	.71
educational level	.61	-.58
cultural orientations	.45	-.22
network (friends)	.49	-.20
network (colleagues)	.52	.08
self-direction/conformity (Kohn-scale)	.53	.16
activities with the child	.57	.36
verbal-supportive rearing styles	.43	.31
punitive-restrictive rearing styles	.27	.54
control over school activities	.12	.61
control over leisure activities	.18	.33
time for the child	.01	.37
Pct explained variance	19.8	15.4

In order to examine changes of the impact of family socialization on sociomoral reasoning, six separate regression analyses were conducted: four regression analyses use sociomoral reasoning in the context of peer relationships at different measurement points as the dependent variable (7, 9, 12 and 15 years); two regression analyses were performed with sociomoral development in the context of parent child relationship as the dependent variable (12 and 15 years). All regression analyses use the same set of predictor variables:

(a) the supportive and restrictive family socialization factors (see table 1),

(b) social class. The latter was included to control for effects not attributable to socialization experiences within the family. Note that significant effects of social class did not emerge in any of the analyses. Therefore, results concerning social class are not reported below.

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a) The impact of family socialization on the development of sociomoral reasoning in the context of peer relationships

Sociomoral reasoning in the context of peer relationships is significantly affected by both family socialization factors at the ages of 7, 9 and 12 years. As indicated by the signs of the β-weights, supportive family socialization fosters sociomoral reasoning in the domain of peer relationships, while restrictive family socialization impedes sociomoral development in this domain. This applies to childhood (7 and 9 years) as well as to early adolescence (12 years). At age 15, the impact of family socialization is no longer statistically significant (p = .595). Thus, in middle adolescence sociomoral reasoning in the context of peer relationships is largely independent of the socialization experience in the family.

	7 years	9 years	12 years	15 years
	β	β	β	β
family socialization:				
supportive	.25 *	.31 **	.19 +	.06
restrictive	-.27 **	-.17 +	-.34 **	-.00
R^2	.1624**	.1462*	.2224**	.0593
F (df)	2.88 (7,10)	2.39 (7,98)	3.92 (7,96)	0.79 (7,88)

+ p <.10; * p < .05; ** p < .01

b) The impact of family socialization on the development of sociomoral reasoning in the context of parent-child relationship

In early adolescence (12 years) sociomoral sensitivity in the context of parent-child relationships is affected neither by supportive nor by restrictive family socialization. However, in middle adolescence (15 years) the two family socialization factors impact substantively on sociomoral reasoning (R = .42). Supportive family socialization appears to foster sociomoral development from early to middle adolescence. For restrictive socialization the reverse is true.

	7 years	9 years	12 years	15 years
	β	β	β	β
family socialization:				
supportive	-	-	.01	.30 **
restrictive	-	-	-.13	-.29 **
R^2	-	-	.0650	.1802
F (df)	-	-	0.95 (7,96)	2.76 (7,88)

* p < .05; ** p < .01

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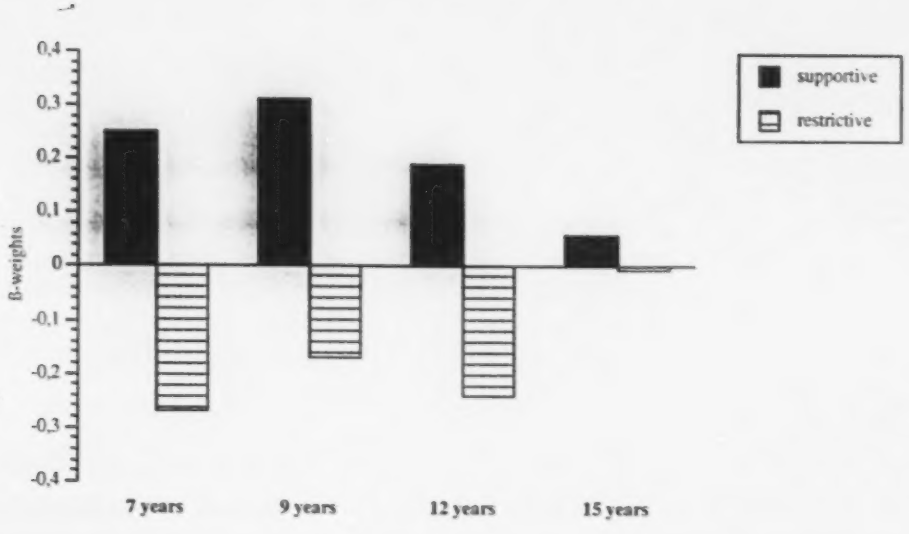

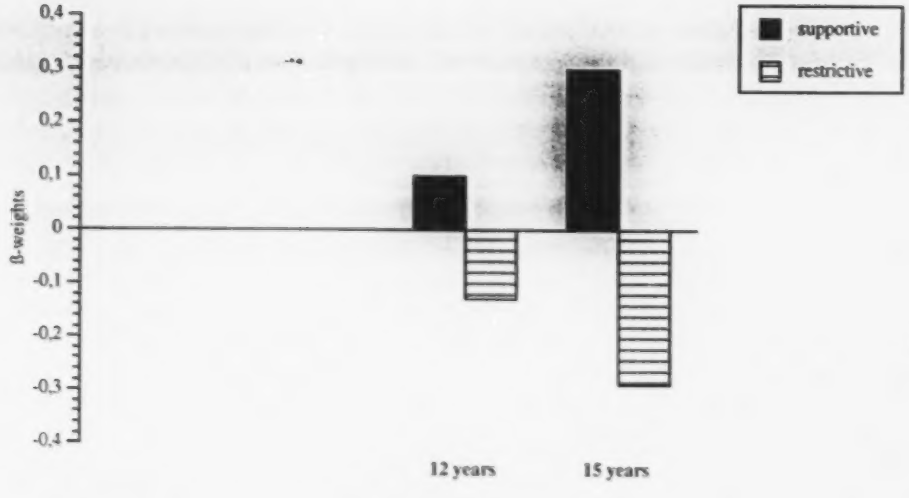

Domain specific effects of family socialization on sociomoral development in the context of peer and parent child relationships

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Conclusion

Consistent with numerous findings reported in the literature the study provides evidence that family socialization affects sociomoral development in a systematic way. While supportive socialization conditions foster sociomoral development, restrictive socialization conditions have disturbing effects. This applies to childhood as well as to adolescence. However, how family socialization exerts its influence changes over time: In childhood and early adolescence family socialization is significantly related both positively and negatively only to the development of sociomoral reasoning in the context of peer relationships and is not related to sociomoral reasoning in the context of parent-child relationships. This pattern is reversed in middle adolescence: At the age of 15 years family socialization exerts influence only in the context of the parent-child relationship, and is unrelated to sociomoral sensitivity in the peer domain. While in childhood and early adolescence family socialization experiences appear to either facilitate or complicate sociomoral development in the context of peer relationships by providing children with necessary competencies for social interaction or withholding such opportunities, in middle adolescence family life becomes an important arena for direct moral socialization. This finding calls for a differentiated appraisal of the impact of family socialization on sociomoral development: it appears necessary to link the internal dynamics of sociomoral development (differentiation and coordination of domains) with the external dynamics (domain specific changes in susceptibility to environmental constraints) in a conceptually meaningful way.

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